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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 004103

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [TO](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: TOGO: MEETING WITH FORMER MINISTER BOKO

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reason 1.4 (b/d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Togo's former Interior Minister Francois Boko visited the Embassy on June 8 to discuss his visa request and prospective travel to the U.S. He also discussed events in Togo, stating that he had little faith that Faure was truly committed to democratic reform. He discussed the role of the Eyadema clan in drug trafficking. He also had little faith in UFC leader Gilchrist Olympio in his self-appointed role of "leader" of the opposition. Boko was disappointed but not surprised by France's response to events in Togo, which he ascribed to France's long practice of supporting the "strong man" of the moment in the hope that that would lead to stability and continued benefit to France. Boko expressed a willingness to consult with USG officials during his upcoming travel to the U.S. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) In good spirits, former Togolese Interior Minister Boko called on embassies on June 8 in connection with his request for a visa to travel to the U.S. in the coming weeks, in response to an invitation from an Amcit in Florida who was a former Peace Corps Volunteer in Togo who lived with Boko's family during his PC service (1978-1980). Boko has kept in close contact with him and with other ex-PCVs and visited him most recently in Florida in November 2004 when the PCV invited Boko to observe the elections process in the U.S. We explained the visa process to Boko and are working with CONS to facilitate an early interview and appropriate courtesies. Boko said he was more than willing to travel to Washington to discuss Togo with USG officials should there be interest in his doing so.

No Faith in Faure  
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3. (C) Boko discussed the situation in Togo at some length. He said that contrary to the image of moderation that Faure was trying to project, Faure, in Boko's view, was cynically trying to retain absolute power in the manner that Eyadema had. After Eyadema's death, Boko said he had had several discussions with Faure, appealing to him that as members of the younger generation, it would be wise for them to engage in the kinds of reform that the Togolese public desired. However, Boko said that Faure has demonstrated little interest in reform and has tried to consolidate power in every way possible.

4. (C) Boko said that Faure had no qualms about resorting to violence if necessary. Boko said that the Togolese military was not as bad as perceived from the outside. He said that in the pre-election period, he had met with military leaders and urged them to avoid hardline tactics before and during the elections. Their attitude, he reported, was reasonable. Boko blamed the violence and killings not so much on the military as on the immediate entourage surrounding Faure, most notably Col. Katanga (NFI), who Boko said was responsible for implementing the violent tactics of repression and intimidation that occurred during the election period. Boko said he was very dismayed to learn that Col. Katanga was scheduled to come to France within a few weeks to begin a program at the Ecole Militaire. He thought, however, that there was a chance the French would rescind his participation.

Faure's "National Unity" a Sham  
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5. (C) Regarding Faure's call for a government of "national unity/reconciliation," Boko said that this was a sham. Faure wanted opposition members to sign on to such a government "blind," without anyone knowing in advance what form this reconciliation government would take and how powers and responsibilities would be shared. Boko said that the government and opposition representatives should instead hold a round table and hammer out an agreement about how such a government would function. Only then, when all parties agreed on a government structure and how power and responsibility would be shared, should the opposition agree to join with Faure.

6. (C) Boko said that Faure was pursuing one of his father's strategies -- call for a government of national unity and then when the opposition balks due to uncertainty about its role in such a government, declare "well, I invited them, but they refused, so I guess I as president will have to run Togo without them." Boko said that Eyadema operated in this manner and he suspected that Faure was following suit.

#### No Faith in Gilchrist Olympio Either

17. (C) When asked whether he had had contact with other Togolese dissidents, such as Gilchrist Olympio, Boko said that he had not, in part because the French, in allowing him to come to France, told him to lay low and not be active politically. However, he said that he also had problems with Olympio, and did not appreciate that Olympio had declared himself "head of the opposition." The "opposition," Boko said, had not "elected" Olympio to be its chief. Boko said that Olympio was carrying on the struggle with the Eyadema clan that started decades before with Olympio's father. Boko criticized both the Eyadema and Olympio clans for continuing to fight these old battles, whereas Togo needed to get beyond the "fathers' war" and deal with today's reality. Both Gilchrist and Faure seemed intent on continuing the paternal wars, which was unfortunate and which, in Boko's view, made Olympio unsuited to be considered the head of the opposition.

#### Drugs

18. (C) Boko described in some detail evidence showing the Eyadema family's involvement in drug trafficking. He said that as Interior Minister, he had developed a counternarcotics program that worked well with the French security and intelligence services. He said that with French cooperation, the two sides intercepted in 2004, near the Cape Verde islands, a ship bound for Togo from Colombia. This ship contained a large quantity of cocaine. When he first informed Eyadema of this operation, Eyadema's initial reaction was to state "make sure that ship isn't seized in Togo." Boko said that later investigation established in his mind a direct connection between the Eyadema family (including Faure) and a longstanding cocaine trafficking operation. Boko said that when shipments came to Togo, an army unit was told to off-load the cargo and store it at an army base, after which the shipments were delivered for further smuggling elsewhere to a "Mr. Ishay" (phon), whom Boko described as a person of Middle Eastern origin who was close to the Eyadema family and resided in Togo. Boko said that the officer at the military base responsible for off-loading and storing the cocaine did not appear to know the nature of the cargo -- he was told that the cargo consisted of industrial chemicals and he had no reason to believe otherwise. This officer later said that there had been "a dozen or more" such shipments in recent years.

#### France and Togo

19. (C) When asked about France and Togo, Boko said that many were disappointed with France's quick endorsement of the elections, despite countervailing views among EU observers and those from other countries such as the U.S. (Boko at several points lauded the support the U.S. had provided to him personally and to the democratic process more generally during the election period.) He attributed the French attitude to what he described as France's "traditional" way of dealing with its former African colonies -- support the "strong man" of the moment, seek stability as the first priority, and continue to benefit from what Boko called the very old tradition of Africa's "strong men" helping French leaders in a number of ways, including financial support. Some of these French political figures then go on to support publicly a return to "normal" relations with Togo, especially in the economic area.

110. (C) Boko was highly critical of individuals such as French citizen Charles Debbasch, whom he described as one of the Eyadema clan's more unsavory advisors, and who had been rewarded by the Faure regime with a quasi-diplomatic status. Boko claimed that it was Debbasch who tipped off the Togolese security forces when Boko was trying to leave Togo quietly for Benin after his public declaration that the April elections should be postponed. He noted that the Amcit he planned to visit in Florida was with Boko in Togo when he called for postponement of the elections, was with him in the car as they tried to leave Togo, and joined him at the German Embassy before Boko was finally able to come to France. Boko also said that this Amcit had a copy of the dossier detailing the Eyadema family's involvement in drug trafficking.

#### Donors Need to Tell Togo What Needs to Happen

111. (C) Boko said that the U.S. and Europeans needed to consult and then present Togo with a roadmap leading to democracy and reform, with the carrot being renewed foreign assistance. Togo, he said, had to be told clearly what it needed to do to return to the good graces of the donor countries. The evidence of the Eyadema clan's involvement with drugs could be used as powerful leverage over Faure, Boko believed.

#### Why Were You a Part of It?

112. (C) When asked about his own role in the Eyadema

government, Boko said that he had received very strong and critical messages questioning his decision to join the GOT as Minister, many from the group of concerned former Peace Corps Volunteers with whom he has kept in touch. He said that he explained to them that if people such as himself, who were interested in reform and progress in Togo, stayed out, then nothing would ever change. He felt obliged, as a member of the younger generation, to give it a try. Obviously, he said, he reached a point where he could no longer tolerate what he saw around him and said what he had to say, irrespective of the consequences.

113. (C) Boko indicated that he planned to establish himself in France, where he had studied previously. He said that his marriage to a French citizen would allow him to stay in France, regardless of whatever status the GOF might accord him as a "political asylee." He mentioned also that a child of the couple was born in France, suggesting that this would strengthen his claim to French residency should there be any doubt.

114. (U) We promised to keep in touch regarding Boko's visa request and said that we remained open to meeting again to continue the discussion.  
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